

St Thomas and Saint Thomas Church of the Air
Thanksgiving Day
November 28, 2024
rmcneely+

We give Thee humble and hearty thanks for this thy bounty.
Beseeching Thee to continue thy loving-kindness to us.

The seeds of this uniquely American Holiday
Were sown
On the shores of Massachusetts near Cape Cod, Plymouth.
By the Hand of God and by some devout people
Whom we would later call; the Pilgrims.

In order to get to the meaning of the story,
Let us briefly review what happened.

They embarked from Southampton England
On two ships the Speedwell and the Mayflower
Speedwell foundered and escaped back to England saving all
aboard
But with them, went half of the provisions of the colony.

Mayflower pressed on but was caught in North Atlantic storms
They expected and provisioned for the usual 23 day crossing.
But it took them 66 days
To fight the westerly winds.
Some days they were pushed back toward England.
They arrived in the thick of a severe winter
Not in the late Fall as expected.
Their provisions gave out long before they sighted land
They were pushed off course
and instead of landing at welcoming Virginia
where there was a colony that could give them aid
they landed near Cape Code on November 11th.
But a few weeks later sailed to a safer anchorage
to what would become Plymouth arriving on Dec 22nd

The survivors numbered 102 souls.
 But after that winter, there were only 53 still alive.
 On this very Day, November 28th, 1621
 403 years ago to the day and almost to this hour,
 the Pilgrims sat at the first
 Thanksgiving dinner
 And thanked God.

Despite all they had suffered,
 They sat down and they thanked God.

And therein lies the power of this story.

Were they thankful for the material bounty of the table,
 Their crops that they had harvested?
 For the assistance of Squanto and his tribesmen?

Or was it something else?

It must be human nature to become numbed to God's Hand in our
 lives

Recall the Children of God wandering the desert of Sinai;
 They were freed from bondage after 413 years,
 They escaped the chariots of Pharaoh, death and capture
 as the Red Sea parted

They were led every day and guarded every night by a pillar of fire
 They were fed every day by the Hand of God
 Yet, they not only lost sight of it and took it all for granted;
 They complained and even rebelled.

Do we do the same on occasion?

Sometimes it is a matter of perspective. We need to maintain the
 proper perspective.

One young woman wrote home from her first year in college this
 letter:

Dear Mom,

Sorry I have not written sooner. I broke my arm, actually I broke my arm and my leg. It was because of the fire in the dorm. I guess I haven't told you about that have I. Sorry. I had to jump from the second floor to escape the flames. But I was lucky. A young man from the gas station down the street was on night shift, saw the fire, called 911 and came to help. The firemen got there right away. I was in the hospital only a few days, but Paul, the service station guy came to visit me every day. When I got out, the dorms were not ready for occupancy but Paul let me stay with him at his place. It was taking so long to get the dorms ready that I moved in with Paul. He's really nice. I must admit to you that I am pregnant and Paul and I plan to be married just as soon as he can get a divorce. I hope things are doing fine at home. I will write when I get the chance.

Love, Your Daughter Suzie.

P.S. None of the above is true. But I did get a "c" in sociology and flunked chemistry. I just wanted you to receive this news in the "proper perspective".

And so as our secular friends

Spend the day watching football

Gorging themselves tonight at their tables

Smashing themselves into the shopping malls in retail frenzy

And wondering what these silly Christians are doing on their knees in church:

We are here to offer thanks unto Almighty God.

For the tangible things?

The bounty of a Thanksgiving Table,

A roof over our heads,

A car in the garage?

Money in the Bank, portfolio?

Perhaps.

But isn't there more,

Something less tangible.

The dawn of a fresh new day

The leaf on a tree, bursting with Fall color

The flowers in the field

The clear blue sky

The night stars

Even our moon

Do we dishonor God when we fail to see Him

In the smile of a baby

Or in the face of a stranger?

We can be ungrateful sods

When some aspect of our lives goes extraordinarily

And unexpectedly well

And we fail to see His Hand in it.

When we are the beneficiary of an act of kindness

A car stops so you can safely walk across the street

A stranger holds the door for you

The person in the grocery line lets you go ahead of her

Because you have only a single purchase.

Someone you never knew buys the coffee of the

Next person in line. You.

Do we always recognize God's Hand in our lives?

The Pilgrims did.

For it was by the Hand of God that they survived the tortuous voyage.

The Hand of God

That got them through a bitter winter.

And they saw it

and they knew it.

They gave thanks for the Hand of God.
And by their example; so do we.

But let me close
with a story
from the editorial pages of a small mid-western newspaper
that ran on Thanksgiving Day several years ago;

It seems the first grade teacher of the grammar school
had the children, 6 and 7 years of age
draw a picture
of the most important thing
for which they wanted to give Thanks.

Now the school was in a poor neighborhood and she knew most of
them would draw pictures of turkeys,
tables laden with food.
Maybe a favorite toy or a friend.

But she was taken aback
by the picture that little Douglas drew.
A simple stick drawing
A childish drawing
Of a hand.
That was all
Just
A hand.

She held each picture up for the class to see,
But when she held up the hand that Douglas had drawn
There was a question
Whose hand?
They were captivated by the rather abstract image.
Some kids thought it the hand of the woman that brings us food.
A farmer, said another, because he grows us turkeys.

Finally, when the kids were back to other tasks at their desks,

The teacher bent down to Douglas and asked him about the hand he had drawn.

Whose hand was it Douglas?

At first the boy said nothing

And then he mumbled

At first she did not think she had heard him correctly

Very quietly he said again:

“It’s your hand, Teacher”.

She realized that at recess she sometimes took the kids by the hand

But she recalled often doing so for Douglas

who was a scrubby forlorn little boy

The teacher began to ponder;

Perhaps this is everyone’s Thanksgiving

Not for the material things given to us

But for the chance

In whatever small way

To give to others,

God works with and through us

In ways that we too often do not even recognize.

Whose hand are you thankful for this Thanksgiving?